

Walter Inglis Anderson

Artist, Naturalist, Mystic



As an artist, Walter Anderson's work defies definition. He began his career as a portrait painter, worked as a pottery decorator, and later developed a theory of art as a means to "realize" the natural world. Many of Walter Anderson's works pull from distinctive styles of art - crossing the boundaries of time and space.



During Walter Anderson's lifetime the Mississippi Gulf Coast was largely undeveloped. Anderson found the natural environment of the rivers, bayous, and barrier islands to be ideal for observations of nature. As you look through his art, notice the different viewpoints that Walter is approaching his subject from. Is it through the grass? From the top of a pine tree? Underwater?



Throughout his life Walter Anderson sought communion with nature. The objects that he left behind paint a portrait of a man seeking hidden knowledge through the medium of art. Sissy, the artist's wife, called him a "mystic, a shaman."



“When I feel the beauty of a flower or the trunk of a tree, I am at once inducted into a world of three dimensions and have a sense of form which is the opposite of artificial forms and conventions.”

- Walter Inglis Anderson

1903

Walter Inglis Anderson
is born to Annette
McConnell and George
Walter Anderson in the
Garden District of
New Orleans, Louisiana.



Walter Anderson as a Child.

Walter Anderson, along with his brothers Peter and James McConnell “Mac” grew up adventurous youths exploring the marshes and woods of their home.

Annette, a student of Newcomb College, taught her boys art, history, and literature. George Walter, took them fishing and hunting. These experiences molded the brothers and influenced their modes of artistic expression from the very beginning.



Peter, Walter, and Mac as Children.

1915

In 1915, Peter and Walter were enrolled in St. John's School, a military academy in New York. Of his time at the school, young Walter sarcastically wrote, "The one great virtue was conformity. you can imagine what a good thing that would be for a young boy who is just beginning to show individuality."



Peter Anderson in his school uniform.

1920

Walter aquired a little cat boat and in August of that year he was lost on the Mississippi Sound and presumed dead. When the young man showed up the next day he reminded his mother, "You knew I could swim."

Boy Believed Dead Had Bad Time On Lake

Marooned 28 Hours, Swam Two Miles to Channel Beacon, Rescued By Passing Fishermen; He Is Now Safe at Home.

Marooned for 28 hours far out in the Mississippi Sound, on a channel beacon, with a storm raging, waves breaking over him and the grim reaper, reaching out his clutching hand, 18 year old Walter Anderson, son of W. G. Anderson, 533 Broadway, president of the Anderson and Jackson grain exporting firm, is safe Thursday at the home of his parents.

While distracted parents conducted a frantic search for the boy whose cat-boat had been found empty and drifting with a tide near Chef Menteur, the object of their search clung to his perilous position of the channel beacon, scanning the waters for a passing boat and drawing mental pictures of huge broiled steaks and enormous goblets of water. Clad only in a bathing suit, exposed to the hot rays of the sun and the biting winds at night the boy became delirious and was fast losing consciousness when rescued.

Boat Passed Him.

For 24 hours he clung to the channel, then a boat came into view, and with it a ray of cheer for rescue was near. But the voice of young Anderson was too weak to be heard, and he had nothing with which to signal. The boat passed on, and the boy was again at the mercy of the waters. "It was a hard blow to have that boat pass by,"

beat passed me by. I crawled up a little further and muttered, "O death! where is thy sting."

"After 12 hours had passed without signs of rescue, I almost gave up hope, and hungry! Man, I could have eaten the shadow of a bean. And I would have cheerfully given my front teeth for a drink of water. It was another case of 'water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink.' Believe me, that little boat that rescued me looked like a floating palace of gold to me."

Dives From Boat.

On Saturday afternoon, young Anderson started for Chef Menteur from Ocean Springs in a small cat-boat. All went well throughout the night, but the next day a storm arose and the sea became rough and choppy. Anderson dived overboard for the tiller that fallen into the water. The strong tide carried the boat away and Anderson was obliged to swim to a channel beacon, nearly two miles away. After a hard battle he made it, and exhausted with the effort, lay on the beacon, which was about three miles from the Lake Borgne light house.

His plight was finally noticed by a passing fisherman, Manuel Lamina, who, was upping in his boat. Anderson was rescued and was supplied with dry clothing and food by Lamina and taken to his parents at Chef Menteur. He is now at home and is recovering from his ordeal.

Newspaper Article, August 1920.

1924

Walter leaves New York for Philadelphia to attend the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Photograph from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Archives, c. 1928. Walter is on the first row, far left.





Being the naturalist he was, Walter would spend most of his time at the zoo, drawing the animals.

Lioness, c. 1927, Graphite on Paper, Courtesy of the family of Walter Anderson

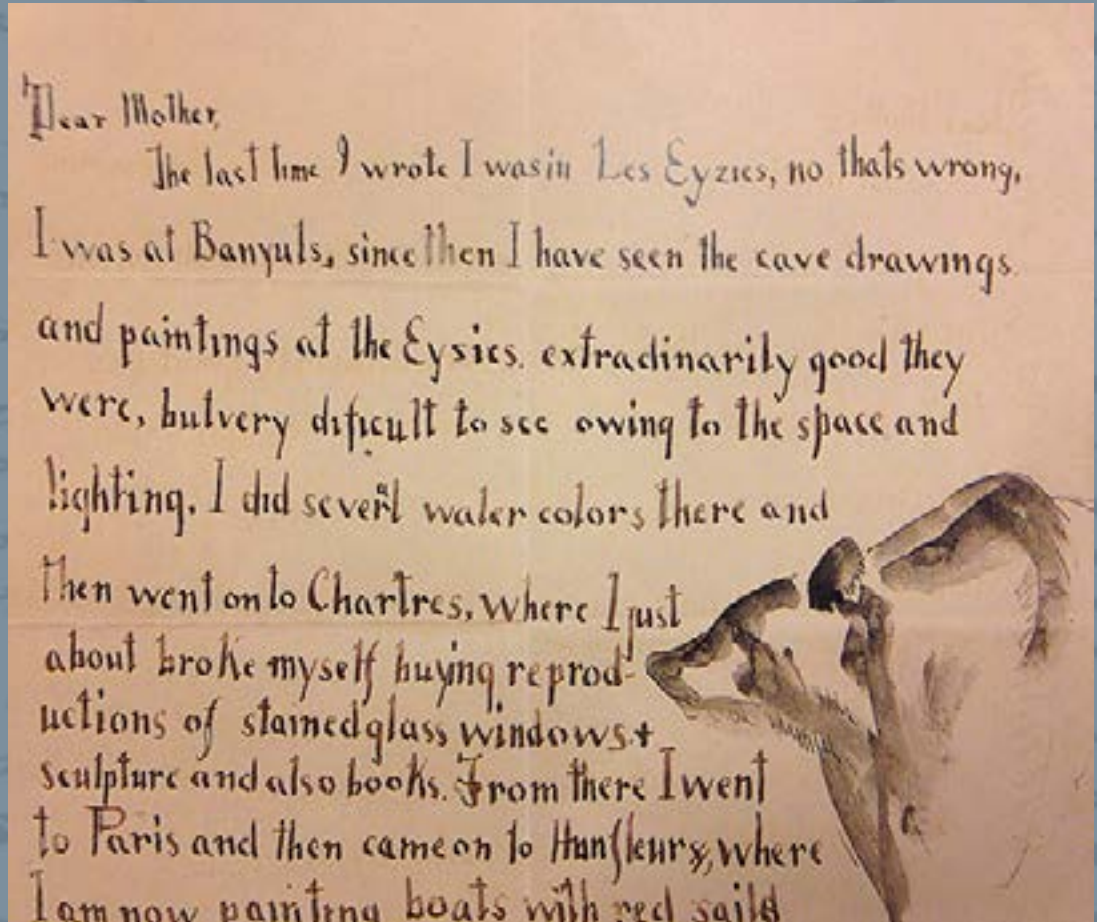


For his work, Walter received a Packard Award for animal drawing from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art.

Lioness, c. 1927, Graphite on Paper, Courtesy of the family of Walter Anderson

1927

Walter Anderson is awarded a Cresson scholarship. The scholarship allows him to travel to France and Spain where is influenced by the art in the cathedrals and the cave paintings at Les Eyzies.



Dear Mother,
The last time I wrote I was in Les Eyzies, no that's wrong,
I was at Banyuls, since then I have seen the cave drawings
and paintings at the Eyzies, extracdinarily good they
were, but very difficult to see owing to the space and
lighting. I did several water colors there and
then went on to Chartres, where I just
about broke myself buying reprodu-
ctions of stained glass windows +
sculpture and also books. From there I went
to Paris and then came on to Hunslers, where
I am now painting boats with red sails

1928

Walter Anderson joins his family in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where his brother, Peter, had started a pottery called Shearwater.



The Anderson brothers on the steps of the Shearwater Showroom, c. 1930.



Dancing Man Vase
Walter Inglis Anderson, decorator
Peter Anderson, potter
c. 1930
Ceramic
Jo Love Little Acquisition Fund Purchase



Man on a Horse
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1935
Oil on board
Courtesy of the Family
of Walter Anderson



Chesty Horse with Flaming Mane and Tail
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1935
Ceramic
Jo Love Little Acquisition Fund Purchase



Don Quixote and Sancho Sketch
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1937
Pencil on Paper
Courtesy of Mary Anderson Pickard



Compote with Birds, Walter Inglis Anderson, decorator, Peter Anderson, potter, c.1950, Ceramic, Gift of David Chipman and Ruth Chipman Busch

1937 - 1940

During this time, Walter suffered from mental illness and was committed to numerous mental healthcare facilities. In the hospital Anderson was subjected to treatment in the form of chemo and hydro-shock therapy. He was also given treatments of metrazol, a drug administered through the veins that throws the patient into convulsions often accompanied by apprehension, fear, and panic.

Anderson escaped the hospitals that he was admitted to several times. One of the most amusing stories of Anderson's escapes involved his exit through a hospital room window with the aid of torn bed sheets. According to Walter's wife, as he was repelling down the side of the building, he paused to draw a mural of birds with a bar of ivory soap.



Man in Palmettos
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1937
Pencil on Paper
Courtesy of the Family
of Walter Anderson



Patient taking an Ice Bath
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1937
Pencil on Paper
Courtesy of the Family of
Walter Anderson

During his time in the mental hospitals, Walter Anderson would write his wife and on the backs of the letters he would draw the two of them at home at Shearwater. In this image, Walter Anderson is gardening and Sissy gathers zinnias behind the house.



Sissy with Zinnias
Walter Inglis Anderson,
c. 1937
Pencil on Paper
Courtesy of the Family
of Walter Anderson

1941

Walter moves with his wife and two children to his wife's family home in Gautier, Mississippi.



Oldfields from below the bluff, 1952. Image courtesy of MGCCC and Down South Magazine.



Fall Woods
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1945
Watercolor on Paper
Permanent Collection



Road to Oldfields
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1945
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of Mary Stone Brister

1941 - 1947

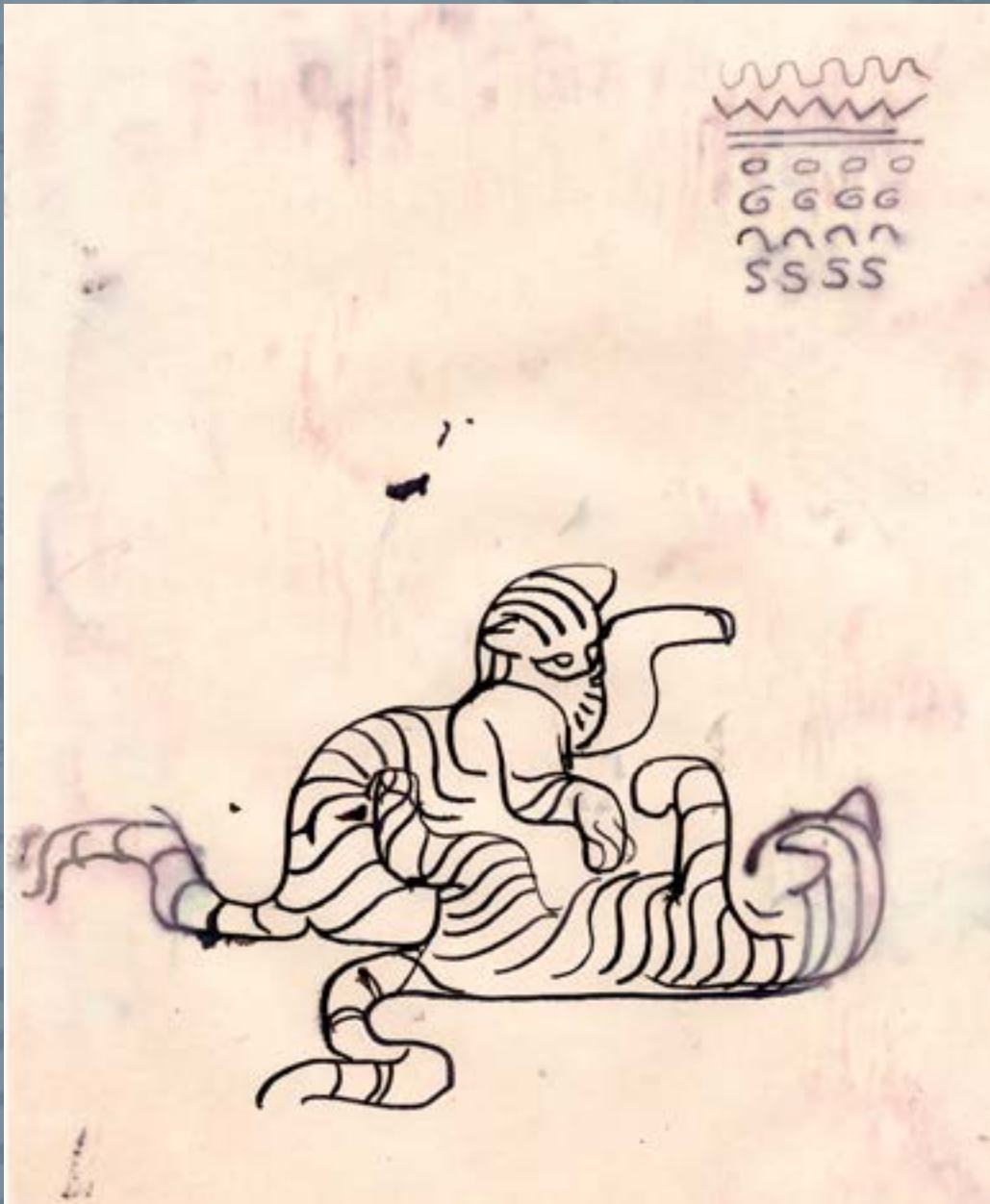
During this period, Walter Anderson is the primary caregiver for his children. Walter draws inspiration for his artwork from his children, their adventures, and their love of fairytales. Oldfields gave birth to Anderson's most prolific period including the calendar drawings, pen and ink illustrations, the Oldfields Murals, and the Linoleum Block Prints.



Pelicans in Flight, Walter Inglis Anderson, c. 1945, Gouache on Wallpaper
Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson



Detail from *Five Fish*, Walter Inglis Anderson c. 1945, Linoleum Block Print
Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson



Two Kittens and Motifs
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1945
Pen and Ink
Courtesy of the Family
of Walter Anderson



Feb - 5th

February 5th
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1945
Pen and Ink and Watercolor
Courtesy of the Family of
Walter Anderson

1947

Sissy and Walter separate. Walter moves into his cottage at Shearwater and Sissy and their now four children move into the “barn,” Walter’s mother’s home on the property.

1948

The Brooklyn Museum holds an exhibition of Walter Anderson's large-scale block prints. This exhibition could have established Anderson as a major American artist but Walter shunned the spotlight. When his family came to get him to go to the opening they found a note on his door reading "Gone to China."

Walter Anderson visits China with the hope of traveling across the country to Tibet. However, the artist is robbed and he is forced to return home prematurely.



Traveler between Villages
Walter Inglis Anderson
Pen and Ink
c. 1948.



Banana Blossoms
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1949
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of the Friends of
Walter Anderson



Chinese Crab
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1949
Watercolor on Paper
Courtesy of the Family
of Walter Anderson



Chinese Lobster, Walter Inglis Anderson, 1949, Watercolor on Paper
Jo Love Little Acquisition Fund Purchase

1950 - 1951

As a gift to the community, Anderson takes on the task of creating a mural for the Ocean Springs Community Center. He adorns the walls with images of the coast's natural and cultural history. He receives a \$1 check for his efforts.



Walter Anderson in front of his Community Center Murals, April 1951.



*Detail from Community Center Mural, Walter Inglis Anderson, 1951, House Paint on Stucco
Ocean Springs Community Center, City of Ocean Springs*



*Southeast Corner,
Community Center
Mural, Walter Inglis
Anderson, 1951, House
Paint on Stucco
Ocean Springs
Community Center,
City of Ocean Springs*



Bust of Allison
Walter Anderson, designer
Peter Anderson, potter
c. 1950
Ceramic
Gift of Frances B. Warden

1950 - 1965

Walter Anderson increases the amount of time that he spends on the barrier islands – especially Horn Island. He rows twelve miles out to the island in his little skiff to study, paint, and experience the majesty of the natural world.



Pelicans on North Key
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1949
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of the Friends of
Walter Anderson to the
museum



Goldenrod on Horn Island
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1955
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of the Friends of
Walter Anderson to the
Museum



Dead Ducks
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1955
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of Carmen Beck



Cormorant
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1953
Polychromed Wood
Jo Love Little Acquisition Fund Purchase



Alligator in a Bulrush Pond
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1959
Watercolor on Paper
Courtesy of the Family of
Walter Anderson



Moths
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1960
Watercolor on Paper
Knight Foundation
Acquisition



Walter Rowing, Walter Inglis Anderson, c. 1950, Watercolor on Paper, Collection of the Family of Walter Anderson

October 1965

Walter Anderson returns from Horn Island and asks his wife, Sissy, to take him to the hospital. She takes him to New Orleans where he dies a month later from surgical complications after an operation for lung cancer.

Shortly after Walter's funeral, his wife, Sissy, and her sister, Pat, enter Walter's cottage to survey his belongings. Along with all of the artwork lying around, they discover a locked room. Unable to find the key, Pat knocks the lock off with Walter's hatchet. They discover a breathtaking mural in the "little room", along with thousands of watercolor paintings, most of which were never before seen.



*The Little Room, South Wall, Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1953, House Paint, Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson*



Detail from Little Room
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1953
House Paint
Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson



*The Little Room, North Wall, Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1953, House Paint, Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson*

*“In order to realize the
beauty of man we must
realize his relation to nature.”*

– Walter Inglis Anderson